



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
June 2020**



June 2020 has been a crazy month with the continued presence of Covid 19 and the weather. We have seen snow, ice, frost, heat and humidity. We have different sections of the state following different sets of guidelines depending on their current Covid 19 cases. We find all NYSDEC fire towers remain closed at this time, though discussions are occurring about when and how to reopen them. We see many visitors to the fire towers, some who respect the closures and some who do not. Many are first time visitors to the fire tower trails and to fire towers. Many come rather unprepared and with the lack of a fire tower steward to provide guidance and education, we see many rescues in the Ranger reports*. We also miss out on the opportunity to inform these new visitors about fire tower history, how to be properly prepared, and how to leave no trace during their visit. Hiking trails provide recreational opportunities and exposure to our beautiful natural resources. Hiking is a healthy activity for our minds and bodies during this unusual time. Respecting rules and regulations that protect all of us should be followed. Some fire tower work does continue and news follows about those activities.

You will note an additional photo in the heading of this newsletter. We have a monthly photo contest on our Facebook page. People submit photos they have taken from any year in a given month. The photo with the most 'likes' becomes the cover photo on Facebook and as of this month, gets added to our newsletter. This month's winner was Lori Ann who submitted this great photo from Pillsbury Fire Tower taken in June of 2019. Thanks to all who play along and congrats to Lori Ann!

Our NYS Chapter has been blessed with a special collection of photographs and other NYS Fire Tower memorabilia from Mark H., our FFLA Eastern Chair. Mark has been interested in fire towers in NYS since he was a young man. A native New Yorker who lived in Schoharie County, Mark carefully gathered information, visited fire towers, and kept great records over the years. He has now generously donated this amazing collection to our NYS Chapter. Over the next few months I will be scanning the numerous photographs, postcards and other treasures and we will be sharing them here, on Facebook and on our webpage <http://nysffla.org/>. Thank you for your tremendous generosity and sharing your love of fire towers with all of us, Mark! Here are examples from Gomer Hill, 1991.



Around the State

Bramley Mt Fire Tower: The Friends of Bramley Mt Fire Tower group got together this past month to put up an “Iron Ranger” to collect donations at the trailhead. The donation box was beautifully constructed by a local iron worker, ROMO Machine, in Andes, NY for a nominal fee. The Friends group followed social distancing guidelines and installed the Iron Ranger along with a brochure holder. Thank you to Ann, Rick, Dave, Tom, and Landon. A great article about their proposed project can be found here: <https://www.the-reporter.net/stories/friends-of-bramley-mountain-push-for-return-of-fire-tower,72262>.



Mt. Arab: Significant trail improvements have been made to the Mt Arab trail by Tahawus Trails. The improvements were contracted through the NYSDEC. A new trail now bypasses a steep bare rock and eroded area of the former trail. The old trail is now blocked off.

Lyon Mt.: A group of three managed to get trail work done on Lyon Mountain Fire Tower Trail this past Saturday. Despite some reports of numerous blowdowns, only one was found, so work progressed on brushing in switchbacks and clearing water bars. Thank you Fred and Tom!

Nimham Fire Tower – The Town of Kent Conservation Advisory Committee says Nimham needs a new roof installed. Not only are they looking for the roof, but they are looking for someone who can get it to the tower and install it. Anyone who can help out, please let me know.

Tower for Sale: Mike Vilegi has taken down a 120' tower in Pennsylvania and brought it to NY. He is selling the first (3) 20' sections separately and has about a 60' tower with the original cab and windows that he would sell. \$30K for the 60' top, plus installation depending on site if needed.

FFLA Maine Chapter: An old lookout mountain gets a new tower. Beginning in the middle of July, a fire tower construction crew will start erecting a new fire tower on Trout Mountain (T2 R9), just south of Baxter State Park. The Nature Conservancy of Maine has been working to erect an 80 foot International Derrick fire tower to be used as a public viewing platform. The tower originally stood in Alabama. Trout mountain once had a 60 foot fire tower on its summit erected in 1931. It was manned until the end of the 1967 fire season. Ten years later in 1977, the tower was burned and cut down by Baxter State Park and Maine Forest Service rangers. That tower still lays on the summit today. Davanna, LLC is the contractor. This project is being run by TNC Maine and paid for by a private party. No state involvement. More information will be posted as it develops, including status and access information.

Trivia: How much were high school boys paid to fight wildfires in the 40's and 50's? Trivia answer from Richard - \$.65 per hour! Paul added that Fire Wardens received \$1.25 per hour and Rangers \$1.45 in the mid fifties.

***From 5-18 Ranger Report:** On May 17 at 10:10 a.m., DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch received a call from a group of hikers on Poke-O-Moonshine Mountain. The caller said a 16-year-old female in the group fell, hurt her ankle, and could not continue down the mountain. Forest Ranger Lt. Brian Dubay and Forest Rangers Sarah Bode, Marie Arnold, Robbi Mecus, and Jared Booth responded. At 2:20 p.m., Rangers placed the hiker from Chazy in a UTV and started down the mountain. At 2:45 p.m., the group was back to the trailhead and the hiker advised she would seek medical attention on her own for the ankle injury.

From 6-3 Ranger Report: Town of Newcomb Essex County Wilderness Rescue: On May 31 at 1:34 p.m., a hiker on Adam's Mountain called DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch reporting a 56-year-old woman from Peru, New York, with an ankle injury just below the steep summit. The hiker was reportedly still trying to progress downhill with assistance from her hiking party but was unable to put any weight on the injured leg. Forest Rangers Sarah Bode, Evan Donegan, Jamison Martin, and Logan Quinn responded, with one ranger bringing an ATV. The hiker had progressed a bit further when she was located by Rangers at 4:17 p.m. The Rangers assisted her to an awaiting ATV for transport to a Ranger vehicle, which then brought her to the Newcomb Rescue Squad before being transport to a local hospital for medical treatment.

From 6-3 Ranger Report: Town of Indian Lake Hamilton County Wilderness Rescue: On May 31 at 1:47 p.m., a hiking group on Blue Mountain contacted DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch reporting a 16-year-old girl from Herkimer with a non-weight-bearing ankle injury. Forest Rangers Melissa Milano and Bruce Lomnitzer, along with Assistant Forest Ranger Allison O'Connell, responded to the trailhead. The hiker was reportedly continuing down the trail with the assistance of her hiking party when they were located by Forest Rangers at 3:35 p.m. Once the ankle was assessed and splinted, Forest Rangers and members of the Blue Mountain Lake Fire Department and Rescue Squad assisted the hiker down the trail and were out of the woods at 5:03 p.m. EMS personnel assessed the girl and she advised she would seek additional medical treatment on her own.

From 6-10 Ranger Report: Herkimer County Wilderness Rescue: On June 5 at 12:35 p.m., DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch received a request for assistance for a 46-year-old male hiker from Princeton, New Jersey, who was halfway up Bald Mountain with an unstable leg injury. Forest Rangers Aimee Bills, Lincoln Hanno and Matthew Savarie responded to the scene and located the hiker and his hiking party at 2 p.m. Rangers carried the injured hiker to the trailhead where they were met by Old Forge Ambulance. The injured hiker declined transport to a local hospital and would seek medical attention on his own.

We thank our NYSDEC Forest Rangers for all of their work in these rescues! We love this quote from the following article "Rangers on patrol in the back country constitute positive reinforcement at its finest, and it is a role they are uniquely equipped to fill. The human touch is irreplaceable in promoting a wilderness ethos." That human touch is what makes fire tower stewards so special too!

<https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2020/06/more-than-ever-we-need-rangers-to-be-ambassadors-for-the-forest-preserve.html>

Stewardship: At the end of May, the NYS Chapter of the FFLA submitted the application for the NYSDEC Stewardship Award. Whether we get the award or not or if other volunteer fire tower groups do, volunteers continue to be the backbone of the NYS Chapter of the FFLA. I wonder if you would all take a moment to send me a sentence or two about a volunteer you have met or worked with at a fire tower? I would like to fill our July newsletter (and possibly more) with quotes from all of you about those volunteer encounters. We greatly appreciate all of the volunteers who help us out.

Membership: Annual FFLA membership dues are fairly inexpensive at just \$15.00 per year: <http://ffla.org/learn-more--join.html> We try to use the funds from your membership and donations that we receive to keep volunteers safe while out working on fire tower projects. In 2020, we have added a third work kit which consists of hard hats, eye protection, ear protection, Clorox wipes, garbage bags, masks, and gloves for a group of 6. Additionally this year in response to Covid 19, we have added hand sanitizer. This year we have also added some items that are very specific to fire tower projects. We have added a wire tie twister tool, clamps, and wire brushes. We also have purchased some extension paint poles. If your group will be doing any work in the future and would like to borrow a kit, please let me know and we will do our best to get a kit to you for your project.

Here is a wonderful story from Dick Veloshen, the past Volunteer Chair at Overlook Fire Tower

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM FIRE TOWER

Overlook Mountain, Woodstock, NY, summer time around 2005, huge billowing clouds filled the blue sky, insects galore, all the foliage in full bloom, overgrown, and as thick as pea soup. It was a beautiful day for a hike up Overlook.

On the trail I met a gentleman pushing his mountain-bike, and he as well as I were heading for the fire tower. We were within a few hundred feet or so of the end of the trail as it turned left in front of the ranger cabin, the biker was on my left on the up-hill side of the trail when something came charging at us thru the thicket above him.

Both of us froze in our tracks expecting to have to defend ourselves, or should I say run away from the worse scenario you could imagine – like a female bear ready to tear up our butts because we were between her and her cubs. With that, this critter crashed headlong into the side of the mountain-bike, bounced back, and ended up sitting there on its haunches, as dumbfounded as we were.



But wait! Could it be? Was this the misanthrope and cynic; prickly on the outside but with a heart of gold, Porky Pine from the Pogo comic strip (1948-75) – sporting a Heinz's Pork & Bean can stuck over its head?

In the dark—no pun intended—and not knowing what to do, the porcupine just sat there in limbo...

With great relief on our part and my blood pressure back to normal, we looked on with amusement at the strange event that had just unfolded before our eyes. Once I realized that this critter was rendered harmless and not likely to impale me with its quilts, I gently pulled the can off its head and with that it blinked its eyes once or twice as if to say, “thanks!” and then it gingerly retreated back into the brush in the direction it had come from.

The Catskills: Fact n Fable... Dick Voloshen, Overlook Mountain, Fire Tower Volunteer

Newsletter Feedback: We did receive a few comments about Fred Knau's article on microspike use on fire tower steps and landings. One suggestion was to go to metal steps and landing boards. The other suggested that many hike to fire towers in winter and they should stay open for those doing so.

Calendar: All activities on hold at this time due to Covid 19.

Some Historical Notes

This wonderful video was posted by Jack Wheeler on our Facebook page. While lengthy, this is worth taking the time to look at: <https://www.facebook.com/126105520249/videos/280123764789/>

Some other history was found recently when a photo was circulated that included John B. The name was familiar to me, but I could not recall him. I asked my Mom who told me the following story: It seems as the radio tech for the Catskills John B. came just once to Balsam Lake Fire Tower. Dad drove him up and back in the old Willy's jeep, the one with no brakes. Upon their return to the trailhead, John asked Dad why he kept turning the jeep on and off. When Dad said it was because he had no brakes, John said, "Do not EVER ask me to come service your radio again!", and I guess he never did!

Retired Forest Ranger, Paul Hartmann tells me his recollections of the Adirondack radio tech, Harry W. "Harry was a great old guy who was interesting to listen to as he had a million stories. First trip up Cat, we took the radio and battery pack. We set it up and fired it up and called Canton. I spotted a box of electronic type tubes. I asked him about them and he told me that if the radio wasn't transmitting he would change out the tube with the red dot on top. If it wouldn't receive he changed out the tube with the blue dot on top. If it didn't seem to work at all he'd change out the batteries."

From Eugene L, past Observer at Whiteface: "I served as Fire Observer on Whiteface Mountain in 1968 and 1969. As you know, many times Whiteface was covered by clouds in the morning or throughout the day. Many times when clouds obscured the top of the mountain, George Youngs, District 9 Supervising Ranger, had me work with Gary Hodgson, Forest Ranger in Lake Placid. In the Winter months I transferred to Whiteface Mt. Ski Center. I was in charge of a number of the trails in the High Peaks such as Mt. Marcy, Dix Mt., Algonquin, Colden, Hurricane and others. I retired from Encon in 2000 after 32 1/2 years service as Conservation Operations Supervisor II, headquartered in Ray Brook. While on "trails", my crew built a number of leantos, the swinging bridge across the Branch (the trail to Mt. Marcy from the south), designed and built the walkway around Avalanche Lake, and designed the dam at Lake Colden, and built the dam at Eagle Lake outlet. Many other things we did when we were on trails."

From Nancy N.: "I enjoy reading about all the fire tower news. I have been going to the Adirondacks for 68 years, first camping at age 3 at Golden Beach, Raquette Lake, with my parents. My first mountain climb was Blue Mt. at age 8 and I still have the little card issued by DEC saying I successfully climbed Blue Mountain. Did not go up the tower (too afraid of heights), but in later years managed to get up to the top. Also have a card from Snowy Mountain. Now many years later my daughter and grandchildren (ages 10 and 13) love to climb various mountains in the western region."

Thank you all for sharing your memories with us!

Laurie Rankin, Director
New York State Chapter
Forest Fire Lookout Association
<http://nysffla.org>